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ABSTRACT

As part of a self-examination of institutional integrity, Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC), in Wisconsin, undertook a project to identify a set of institutional values and determine the extent that they were exemplified in the college's practices and relationships. The six institutional values were identified as integrity, collaborative partnerships, innovation, continuous improvement, customer focus, and diversity. In the first step of the project, each value was defined in a narrative form to clearly communicate what was specifically intended in the value statement. The values were then cross-referenced to their related board and administrative policies. College strengths, or specific FVTC practices which exemplified the values, were then identified, and opportunities for improvement were determined by defining behaviors and practices which could be improved to bring the college more in line with the intent of each value statement. For example, efforts related to college diversity were identified as strengths, including the formation of a college Diversity Committee, an institutional emphasis on international and intercultural programming, and staff development and minority recruitment activities. Similarly, slow response time to the needs of the college's customers was identified as an opportunity for improvement. Finally, FVTC's performance was rated with respect to agreement between institutional practices and values, with results forming part of the college's accreditation self-study report. (TGI)

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Criterion Five: A Values-Based Approach

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The 13-member NCA Integrity Subcommittee, representing a cross-section of members from all areas of Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) in Appleton, Wisconsin, convened to determine an appropriate approach to examining the important issue of institutional integrity. Through a policy inventory of board and admininstrative documents governing FVTC, the subcommittee verified that these documents define the legal, social and ethical parameters of FVTC operations. It became clear that policy analysis was only part of the self-examination of institutional integrity. With further study, our organizational value statements were identified as explicit statements of how FVTC was expected to operate and truly a better yardstick of integrity than policy statements. The role of values in relation to integrity was reinforced by a literature review and NCA conference presentations on the subject. With a set of articulated institutional values, the subcommittee designed a process to take a closer look at how the College's values are exemplified in the practices and relationships throughout FVTC and areas for improvement.

Values Articulation

The public nature of FVTC effectively mandates the development, adherence to and monitoring of policies such as affirmative action that establish expectations for institutional behaviors and related accountability system. Even with these ethical underpinnings, FVTC has made a common practice of articulating the key value statements which embody its actions. Early in the self-study process, these value statements were reviewed and revised in conjunction with the development of the college mission and vision.

The six FVTC Value Statements are:

Integrity
We value responsible, accountable, ethical behavior in an atmosphere of honest, open communication with mutual respect and caring for each other.

Collaborative Partnerships
We value partnerships with business, industry, government, educational systems, and our communities.

Innovation
We value creative risk-taking and enthusiastic pursuit of new ideas.

Continuous Improvement
We value continuous improvement of our programs, services and processes through employee empowerment and professional development in a team-based culture.

Customer - Focus

We value commitment to student/staff success and satisfaction by responding to customer needs.

Diversity

We value an educational environment that attracts, nurtures, and supports a diverse student and staff community.

The NCA Integrity Subcommittee reached consensus that the integrity expections of FVTC were captured in the six value statements. However, a "test" of the College's performance related to the statements had never been attempted. Several elements of the process design surfaced as clear components to address:

Definition - each value needed to be defined in relation to "patterns of evidence" which could be found in an organization which ideally exemplied this value in practice.

Policy Linkage - the process would include a cross-referencing of the board and admininstrative policies which related to each specific value.

Strengths - the process would identify FVTC practices which exemplify the value.

Opportunities for Improvement - the process would solicit and explain the behaviors and practices which could specifically be improved in order for FVTC to be more aligned with the intent of the value statement.

Measurement - the process would include a method to rate FVTC performance as part of the NCA Self Study.

In addition to these components, the participatory and evaluative environment of FVTC were key process considerations. Although the process could be piloted with the subcommittee, it needed broad representative participation to be consistent with organizational norms. The notion of a "values audit" may be ominous for some organizations. However, as a learning organization involved for many years in TQM, FVTC is accustomed to practices which examine the organizational climate and evaluate program performance through regular and college wide audit activities.

<u>Overall Process</u>

The NCA Integrity Subcommittee used group brainstorming and prioritization processes to identify the elements of an operational definition of each value, specify examples of FVTC strengths and opportunities for improvement, and rate performance to obtain a ballpark view of how we actually performed. Upon completion of the subcommittee exercise, more staff input was received from key FVTC leadership teams: the Strategic Leadership Team and the Total Quality Leadership Team so that a total of 25 people ultimately participated in the values audit

process. The Criterion Five chapter of the self study was based on the findings of this exercise and accepted by the NCA Visiting Team as part of their October, 1995 visit.

Operational Definition

The act of defining the value in a narrative form was intended to as clearly a possible communicate specifically what was intended in the value statement. The NCA Integrity Subcommittee members were able to articulate the behavior evident in an organization which was living by the value statement. The following is an example of the operational definition of the FVTC organization value of Integrity.

Sample - Operational Definition of Value Statement
FVTC Value Statement of *Integrity*

"An organization that values "integrity" is able to trust people and information throughout the organization. Decisions are taken at face value without concern that process considerations have been ignored or that personal agendas drive decisions. There is no need to explain operating procedures because they are universally understood. This trustworthy atmosphere nurtures confidence that promised actions and verbal agreements can be depended upon to become reality ("walk the talk"). Every process, budget, and report are to be shared with all members openly. Consistent and useful communication fosters a secure environment in which to challenge the status quo without retaliation. This honesty motivates members to constantly evaluate themselves and consider ways to improve behaviors.

Above all, each member operates with the certainty that everyone can be trusted to do their jobs to the best of their ability. Each person is a valuable asset, not a cost. The organization works to remove fears and ignorance, and the dignity of each individual is respected. The "golden rule" is operative in that members treat each other the way they want to be treated. The organization ultimately defines its highest achievement as being respected in the eyes of students and the community because of its demonstrated integrity."

(from FVTC Self-Study, 1995, p.202-203)

Strengths in Relation to the Value Statements

The brainstorming and feedback process to identify strengths is essentially a listing in which the frequency or priority of statements shape the narrative discussion of the strengths. The following is an example of how Strengths are described in relationship to the value statement.

Sample: Strengths
FVTC Value Statement of *Diversity*

"FVTC has initiated formal and direct actions to support the value of diversity. A Diversity Committee has been organized to provide a focus for issue awareness and assertive implementation. There has been an expanded emphasis upon international/intercultural programming with the addition of diversity-related classes and curriculum. Structured staff development opportunities, including a diversity course for certification, are available to encourage staff involvement. The minority

recruiter position provides an in-house resource for recruitment and retention services to encourage a more diverse student population.

The broader definition of diversity extends beyond cultural aspects to address equal opportunity for special populations including women, older adults and people with disabilities. The staff position of Gender Equity Coordinator has helped to raise a focus for both students and staff on the need for and provision of education on such topics as sexual harassment in the workplace. SeniorNet computer classes for older adults and ESL for the Hmong population are examples of special efforts supported by the College to serve the needs of special populations. In the area of opinion diversity, FVTC's implementation of mutual gains bargaining and consensus building in teams provides a model and method for the constructive airing of different points of view."

(from FVTC Self-Study, 1995, p.211-212)

Opportunities for Improvement

Priorization or the affinity of a line of thinking is the framework for developing the narrative for each value statement. The section is an honest reflection of the overall thinking on the behaviors that need to improve to truly become more aligned with the value statements with relevant examples of practice. The following is an example of how Opportunities for Improvement are described in relationship to the value statement.

Sample Excerpt - Opportunities for Improvement
FVTC Value Statement - Customer Focus

"FVTC proclaims its value of customer focus loudly which, consequently, means that all identified needs are watched closely for expeditious action. The wheels of bureaucratic action are often less than responsive to customer needs. Faster response time is needed for employer requests for new academic programs to meet their work force needs. The educational reality of waiting lists is never viewed as customer friendly, but there is a need for a consistent and uniform process to deal with applicants on waiting lists across all instructional areas. Overloaded managers are not always available when a timely decision needs to be made regarding individual customer situations. Similarly, this overload extends to support staff who need front-line support so they can better relate to customers. It is, at times, difficult for students to get the kind of assistance commensurate with a customer-focused organization.

Staff knowledge that some customers may not be receiving the best service possible creates stress for those who care about providing good customer service. Not only is waiting for a response stressful but so is the lack of a similar commitment by other staff who forget that their job is to satisfy students. On some occasions, waiting to deliver a service "with all the bugs out" is truly being sensitive to the customer. However, getting necessary equipment, software, training, and technologies creates delays in uniform service delivery and causes stress."

(from FVTC Self-Study, 1995, p.210-211)

Measurement

The degree of institutional behaviors being connected with each Value Statement was quantified in a performance rating exercise. A scale of 1(low) to 10(high) rating was used to collect responses based on FVTC's usual and customary overall performance related to the value. Individual ratings were averaged to establish an overall current rating for each value. The ratings were visually plotted on a Spider Diagram. The conclusion of the Integrity chapter uses these ratings to summarize the values based review.

Sample - Conclusion of Integrity Chapter

> *"The overall evaluation of FVTC performance in relation to the six value statements of the organization is above satisfactory (6.6). The highest rated value was Collaborative Partnerships (7.7) with commentary to suggest that current efforts are exemplary and need to expand the new arenas. The value of Innovation was rated quite high (6.9) in overall performance with a clear challenge for the organization to systematically "push the envelope" and be sure to attend to the follow-up processes to support innovative efforts. The mid-ranked value of Customer Focus (6.6) had the narrowest point spread between the highest and the lowest rating. This factor indicates greater overall consensus on the College's performance related to customers and the need to strengthen our methods of advancing meaningful customer service. The rating for Continuous Improvement (6.3) on the lower end of ratings sends a message that as staff identify areas for change, there must be more visible indication that concerns are being actively addressed to truly result in improvement. It is apparent that staff feel FVTC's efforts to fulfill the value of Diversity (6.2) are just beginning to have an impact on the overall performance of the College. Finally, the value of Integrity (6) is rated at the low end of all the values, underscoring that there is clearly room for improvement not only with internal systems and processes but in strengthening the purposeful integration of personal values of effectiveness in both internal and external relationships."*
>
> (from FVTC Self-Study, 1995, p.212)

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